

AN IDYLL OF A QUEEN

BY

Jean Parke

A N I D Y L L O F A Q U E E N

Old World Symphony

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**

Herewith, in reverence for the past,

I dedicate

The sequence and the cadence of a well remembered dream,

Whose overtones from first to last

Anticipate

Mythologies and credos yet to come,

Which in their witching hour of power

Shall veritably seem

As natural as the measures of a gently flowing stream.

I

Long ago in saga-time, on the rim of the Northern Sea, a youthful alien queen awaited the coming of her first-born, the heir who, should the norms agree, must rule in time his native land. How stern the faith whose latent rites had sent forth mighty hosts of Christian knights to guard an empty sepulcher, held sacred now a thousand years and more.

Full were her days with reveries, with memories and prophecies. For the past was as the thunder of many waters, and the future as a rushing mighty wind, and seldom could she discern the frail frontier between them. Rare were the moments when she could part the sound of one from the sound of the other, and rising clear of both, there on the fragile reef of reality, recognize and realize the priceless immediacy of the present.

Now with the season at high noon, her dreams and visions were diffused in the vast, pale, ethereal transience of unvarying light, one bland, luminous, all-persistent day, dissolving shadow and substance alike, diluting all intensity of impulse, absolving the will of direction or adventure.

She rode forth no more on her shaggy sure-footed pony through shadowed forests over the seven hills of her surrounding realm. She longed no more for the roar of winds in the shuddering sail of the great dragon-ship that had brought her from that other stronghold, an island still farther to the north, where night was night, fearful and wonderful, dazzling and resplendent, and where the Aurora Borealis had poured its radiance through all the waking dreams of her girlhood. Nor did

she venture now upon the smiling waters of the fjord, but for the most part paced the empty corridors within her fortress home, companioned only by the whispering of her secret thoughts and the sounds of her echoing steps.

There had been times when she had loved to lean upon the balustrade of her balcony toward the west and catch the slow sun sink from sight, spreading its afterglow over the sky till all the world was bathed in pale yellow light.

At nightfall, when dark came early, and the members of the household, young and old, had circled round the central hearth with its ascending pillar of fire, she leaned upon the running tide of laughter and of song, until a grave and deepening hush foretold some stern recital by the skald. Beyond all else she loved the singing of the many thanes in mighty unison. For often to her delight the surging sound and resonance of male voices rising and falling came as waves of light and heat. She would give herself to the undulating swell of the sustaining element, as a bird to the wave.

But now the days had grown too long to spend the hours in errant ways. In reticence of sight she sought the tempered light that filled some somber inner room, finding rest in utter calm and balm in gloom.

Svanhild was her name, and she was the very one from whose existence many legends grew that were told and sung and written and painted and carved and woven, over and over again by each succeeding generation. Wherefore even today you can find the records of which she was the legendary origin and heroine. For when she was a tiny child in her father's home she had as a playmate a great, white, singing swan. The two were inseparable, by day and by night, at play or at rest. When in their wanderings they would come upon some mist-hung lagoon, some unexpected stream made by the sudden melting of ice or snow, or stranger still, find a warm black pool of perilous depth

in some fantastic icicled grotto, the child would ride upon the swan in sovereign security and regal pride. She carried her head as though it wore a crown of stars, invisible by day, while behind her in a heavy mass her shadowy wine-hued hair streamed down, dark and shining and straight as rain. Kneeling on the ample back, her delicate arms clasping the looped curve of its powerful neck, sailing serenely over the water on the graceful living ^{barge} ~~xxx~~, she knew she lived a charmed life. But this was far away, in another realm of more vivid intensity, of sharper imagery. Even its remembrance partook of this season's softness, floating bland and tempered in the flood tide of midsummer's lilt and lassitude.

Now for many long lingering days and calm white nights there had been no darkness at any time. A foaming milky pallor suffused the sky, devoid of stars throughout the hours once saved for rest or spent for revelry. Everyone was abroad, each moving in his own waking dream, unbroken by recurrent thoughts of hearth or home. Chains of habit had slipped away. Svanhild alone reigned over the deserted court, and time stood still.

II

Now there dwelt at the fortress one Ragna, who through the many years of her long life had come to rejoice greatly in the authority she exercised over the comings and goings, the sayings and doings, the morals and manners of the court at large. Of course, when she was a young girl, she had not aspired to any such office of importance, in fact, gladly would she have evaded any and all responsibility in favor of the lightsome lot of other much-sought damsels. Naturligvis! But alas, laughter and song and dancing steps, with winsome ways and wooing banter were graces she lacked. From the first, she had been a willing advocate of order and dignity in the court. She rejoiced in the service of Ranghena and her adored brother Ghenalt; together they formed a happy trio, for all their seriousness and responsibility. Youth will be youth. Both girls were extravagantly proud of Ghenalt's scholarship and the recognition accorded him of his phenomenal gifts. They said a trustful farewell when he departed for the Faeroes to continue his ecclesiastical studies, completely unaware that his bonds would lead to a place of no return, the final vows of celibacy. How could they have dreamed in their unchastened youth of the human sacrifice the hidden future should impose? Ah - that was long ago, but the loss persisted to this very day and hour.

Eventually pride came back to Ragna, when the great news came that he had been appointed bishop of the Faeroes, and master of the great school where he had served his novitiate; but a later grief had invaded her consciousness and impaired her youth, Ranghena's sudden death, leaving a newborn child in her arms, to rear as king.

Still, the august mantle that fell upon her strong and willing shoulders became her. She bore it bravely, with dignity and stateliness, but she was humbly grateful for the lad entrusted to her. He

was obedient in all respects, even to this very day. As sometimes you have seen a great bear led by the merest wisp of cord, because when he was a tiny cub he was too weak to break the fetter that still sufficed, even so the great and glorious ruler of the realm was strangely unaware that he could disobey. He accepted her dominion with gratitude and affection, received her commendation with pride, her rebuke with equal humility, calling her still as in his childhood, Ragna-mor.

In the monarch's bedchamber there still hung a plaque with the inscription which he himself had carved in wood when he was a lad of twelve: IF YOU WOULD COMMAND OBEDIENCE FIRST LEARN TO OBEY. As boy and man he was a credit to this precept. Once king, he was a man of action, and because the motives that activated him were so clear that anyone who ran might read, Ragna found him easy to direct.

It was not so easy, however, at this late date to snare the queen, who had grown to full stature at the head of her father's house in blissful ignorance of queen's councillors. Then too, like all who are native to the arctic north and flourish there, who fear not the dark, nor find loneliness in solitude, she dwelt in a world of her own creation, where none might enter save by the drawbridge of imagination, seldom lowered to anyone, and certainly not to Ragna. Therefore, however persistently she tried, Ragna exerted no control, influence or persuasion over the ways of Svanhild. But how anyone, disclaiming all authority, and so reticent in demanding the time and attention of others, could call forth such implicit devotion, gave pause to the militant spinster. Such absence of resistance took the zest out of her own triumphs. It was quite as though she had sewn a long, long seam, staunchly, stitch after stitch, and when she deftly drew the thread, lo, it had all come out in her hand, and hung there limply with no knot at the end. What an enigma was the queen! How inscrutable were

her ways! How came it that in all the court such tireless ministration attended the slightest wish of this passive, alien presence, that her handmaidens wove and spun, sewed and embroidered, sang and made merry at their tasks, and the whole confine hummed as a hive, and never so before in Ragns's memory? Nevertheless, though the cause thereof was not to be explained, the result as such was not to be complained of. Work to her was an end in itself. She was most satisfied when the busy worker bees were in full charge, with all the drones driven forth to seek trouble elsewhere, and the silent queen, resplendent in captivity, counting her days alone over an empty cradle. In the high blue atmosphere of noon, Svanhild's tresses held the glory of the autumn trees that in the twilight darkened to the tone of wet wine lees, but in the firelight turned to molten crimson, whose color matched the splendor of the midnight sun. Beneath the silver lustre of the moon, alas, the heavy mass shone black as winter's fearsome cowl of night. But Ragna had no time to waste in idle speculation on the shade and sheen or changeful hue of Svanhild'd crowning glory, there on view for any passing swain or thane to feast his kindling gaze upon, the while the wheels of toil turned hummingly.

For Ragna this teeming tide of work, this tidal mood of industry sufficed in full. The labors and exertions that ceaselessly did serve and conserve life, its tenderest needs and wildest purposes, to her took precedence above and beyond these needs themselves. The accompaniment all but drowned out the ballad of love or of death, yet by its own sustaining momentum kept her safe from the undertow of either. With tremors of love and rumors of war she was concerned only as baleful interruptions, menacing the rhythm of work.

In the presence of the monarch at home and at peace she felt secure as never before, for Ragna put her trust in princes and their power to

foster and assure the people's weal and will to work, and measured welfare by resounding toil. Had she not trained a princeling in the image of her own ideal? Did he not hold his place in the sun with bold tenacity and zeal? The powerful of the earth had now discarded the raucus clang of arms in favor of round-tables, where knights and kings in amity assembled might find the fair, the just solution, missed in trial by battle, and take pride in lofty views and noble dealings. With himself, her pride and joy, returned from the magic East to rule his native land, she was both heartened and relieved. Above all, she had faith in his marriage to the daughter of Iceland's great gode, whose crystalline thought, far-flung, even as the effulgence of the northern lights, outshone the confines of his rule and realm. She hoped with a mighty hope that here in this majestic domain of unfathomable fjords and impassable mountains the king might be content long to abide and prosper. For here the land so projected into the sea, and the sea so invaded the land, that one might be on shore and at sea at the same time. The unknown still permeated the known, and the challenge of the mysterious pervaded unexplored valley and gorge and virgin woodland, and the strange and the familiar were intermingled everywhere at once. What wider range of conquest could any king require, what wider realm to rule should he desire?

Krystjan was his name, and he knew Latin. So ran the current comment upon the kindly king, victorious soldier and lettered ruler. At least, so was he called at home, but not in documents of State or on the pages of latter-day history. And as to Latin, he could read it from tablets and scrolls, and write it out fair and clear on parchment, but you could not say that he knew the Latin speech by intimate experience therewith, for naturally, in his native land he spoke his mother tongue.

To be sure, he had picked up on his travels strange phrases and tricks of mind that needed thinking out in another language, but when Ragna saw the look of such thoughts on his fair frank face, she knew they would soon fade out and nevermore be missed, to say nothing of his taste for foreign/raiments, sumptuous in color and design and dyes unknown, baffling to Ragna's observant keenness; perishable stuff, priceless purchases with names as untranslatable as Krystjan's thoughts. Weird wares indeed, and weavings which, once they were worn out, might never be replaced by all the wives and spinsters of the north. Only the lustre of their texture would survive as a bright memory, and in time fuse with the vainglory of forgotten field of honor, and as a mirage in the desert, finally fade from his mind.

But Ragna was grateful for Latin, for the serene persistence of a dead language held high in sanctity and authority. She rejoiced that there was something in this world of babel tongues that literate folk of different climes could agree on. Indeed, agreement on terms brought all seekers within sight of their final goal. Naturligvis. What a comfort in these days of flux and change, with vague new meanings springing up on every hand and sliding scales of emphasis and inference that one could scarce keep track of and do anything else! Indeed, indeed the dead tongue was a blessing, for could it speak, the sense would hardly stay the same for long, and stable peace was doomed. In static forms long crystallized by use, now lay the one lone chance of world communication, the last lorn hope of earthly concord. Amen.

At Easter time, Krystjan had made a hurried visit to the Faeroe Islands at the bidding of his uncle, the bishop there, who from his austere isolation directed the ecclesiastical affairs of many kings. It was there Krystjan had spent much of his youth under the rigid regime and scholastic rigors of the church. A hurried visit was all very well,

but there had been a time when Ragna had looked with deadly fear upon that bleak place as upon a prison that might close forever upon her gallant charge and bury him from the riotous world he loved, and the good life for which he was so richly endowed with his bent for leadership and fellowship.

In his company when he returned was an alien elfin child, incredible quiet and self-contained, a veritable courtier whose shy dignity evoked unquestioning respect. Though reticent in speech, he seemed to understand the meaning of life about him, the spirit if not the vernacular. The various members of the household were fascinated by his striking manner and appearance. He had traveled all the way from Provence, was of noble birth, small and slight for his eleven years of growth, and uncannily precocious. He was pale and dark and clad in the deepest mourning. To Ragna, his attire was a challenge, and she welcomed such care of the incomparable garments as fell to her lot, and lavished much thought upon the unfamiliar and superlatively fine fabrics. Their fashioning provoked curiosity as well as admiration, for so deftly did they follow the curves of his lithe figure as to draw with every line the living shape, and stamp the complete design with the taste, style and grace of France.

Cradled in his arms was his most cherished possession, a delicate vibrant lute given him by his tutor, who had been a troubadour before taking orders, and had trained the lad to play upon the instrument with ease and grace.

He was to be part of the court and live the life here. He was to learn running on skis, carving in wood, sailing of boats, hurling of spears, and many other manly arts. The king himself was to hear his Latin and correct his sums, but beyond this brief supervision, Krystjan believed him, by reason of his tender years and delicate mind, most

suitably placed on the spindle side, among the youthful apprentices under Ragna, for indeed, here as in other lands, the walled seclusion devoted to the industry of women was the most civilized part of the castle. Nor should the lad lack utterly religion's guiding gleam, for here he might from her direct example learn the force of Ragna's living creed, that willing work was not only an end in itself, like praise and worship, but the positive proof of a purposeful, supernal order.

III

As for Anatole, he would have asked nothing better than the privilege of serving the queen, but for this boon he might not ask, and he was grateful when it fell out that he was to wait upon those who waited on her. In other words, her ladies-in-waiting, handmaidens, who by the best of luck chanced to be two winsome willowy lasses of approximately thirteen years apiece, whom he was to call respectively Helma and Selma. They took themselves seriously as to decoration. To the observant eye of the little French courtier, they seemed to fall of their own accord into the sort of balanced arrangement suitable for a tableau vivant. Whether at spinning or winding, or merely carding their wool, they always moved in harmony, with complementary gestures. They bowed, curtsied, danced, sang and even talked in concert, that is, they began on the same beat and stopped on the same beat. Taking them all in all, together with their northern tongue, which even in the simplest solo rendering confused his ear, they were much better seen than heard, just as he had been taught all his life children should be. Still, however and notwithstanding, they communicated by hook or crook, and as children can, managed to play together at the most fantastic of hybrid games. For example, the very complicated variety of cat's cradle with a ring in it, first tangled, then untangled in the swaying strands of hemp. When the three together had gotten it into the worst possible snarl, only one might unravel the tortured maze, while the others sang to keep up the confusion; a fresh version of the world-old theme, the labyrinthine test of patience and saving grace of a single thread, held fast. They romped and rambled, skipped and gamboled, giggled and had fun.

Whenever it was possible, however, the boy sought stealthily to watch the queen, who openly watched him. Her glance upon him was too

much for Anatole, compelling as a mirror in the room wherein one's own reflection acts as a magnet one would fain avoid. Still, there were times for watching her when she was not aware of his presence, and these were moments of rich reward, not only for waiting, but for many other distresses; for instance, in the evening before the fire, when she sat spellbound by some flowing narrative of ancient heroism or stratagem, of early voyages fraught with the danger and the dread, the rapture and the risk, which however familiar to the other hearers were new to her and to Anatole. Then he could fill his eyes with an image so foreign that never could he learn it by heart, but seemed ever to look at her as though for the first time. Yet he had loved the first sight of her and always the last sight of her. Beauty in a mysterious guise, of a strangeness in color and contour, and set down here in this unfamiliar scene, this wild abode of other alien nature far from France, yet some things were the same at home. In the forest in the fall, through vistas where the sunset burned the leaves, he had seen the color of her hair as now it fell over her shoulders in the firelight. Daily in the unwavering light of tall white tapers, always burning in an orifice of his mother's chamber, he had passed a sculptured face that held the self-same marbled calm. How often now he watched with fervor, crouched upon his knees as though before a shrine, that royal pallor as unchanged by fire or frost, by haste or hindrance, as the carved visage of the saint! A shining countenance was hers, yet ever in repose, as though like the statue her mien were cast in quietude. Even the pliant circlet of gleaming gold laid parallel over the straight level brows, was startling in its similarity. How like indeed, how very like! The same reserve, the same ethereal tenderness. The mask of beauty worn on earth in every clime at any time, in life or art, must look the same. This much he knew!

But the dark listening eyes, fixed and unseeing as twin charms set wide apart, dazzling and unreadable, were unlike - unlike - unlike to anything in all the land of the living. Black opals, in whose shadowy depths lurked two live sparks, with powers other than sight. Precious jewels, perhaps far down in the depths of the sea or long hidden in a mine, alone and unknown might shine thus of their own substance or essence, without thought, sentience or reflection of the inner or the outer world. Enchanted with such purity of form derived from super-nature, what to him were hero-tales, heard but as waves that rock the boat in which one dreams? Those endless cantos, on and on, of voyagers returning from beyond the horizon with wild words and weird apparel, with coronets of coral shells and crests of feathers like the dread dark helmets of Valhalla, were but fables to Anatole. Yet how suitable, with their constant repetition and ponderous rise and fall, as accompaniment for gazing on the image of the queen! Else he should have slept through them, no more troubled to understand or believe a word of them than if they had been the thudding sound of the sea on the side of the ship.

It was a different matter when Svanhild sang songs and told stories to the children. Anatole was all ears, and because all of his being went into the hearing, the tales and tunes persisted as clear indelible records. He could repeat them line for line, measure for measure, and many years later he set them down for children in his native tongue, with snatches of the stark refrains.

From the first, Svanhild had been the simplest for him to understand, but then she made a studied adaptation of her mood and tense, and so swift were the intuitive processes of the Arctic queen and the Gallic page that soon there developed a fine felicity of communication between them.

Svanhild had extraordinary pictorial powers. Not only did she

excel in picture language, but she was mistress of pantomime. She could draw, paint and carve with her gestures, and conjuring with sight and sound would summon forth whole scenes and episodes. Though the crystal in which she had been wont to read the past, present and future lay with her treasure chest under the sea, whatever she saw within the crystal depths of her own mind was mirrored for the children, regardless of time or distance, so that they seemed to recall vividly what indeed they had never experienced at all.

IV

Svanhild speaks and tells the story:

"One dark day I sat upon the rampart of the watch tower of Erne-Aery, waiting for my father's homecoming. His absence had seemed long and my vigil grew into longing. The hour was late when at last through the clear silence came a blast from the twin lurs over the gate. Tuned in perfect harmony, they gave forth a slow wavering trill like an exercise in thirds, then swerved suddenly down and up in the strangest, wildest interval, followed by a ringing overtone that completed the phrase and resolved the chord - and that I cannot imitate and have given up trying. Always a glorious sound, heralding the unknown, this time it seemed to foretell some visitation fresh and innocent that should play a lively rôle in life at Erne-Aery.

"Suddenly, all over the quiet snow the breath of expectancy gathered, torches flared up and men came running, crowding through the narrow portal to meet the returning travelers. I might not follow beyond the gate of the courtyard, and hard was waiting. Tears had frozen on my cheeks by the time my father strode through the guard and laid at my feet a dim soft bundle. He pulled off his great star-pointed cap covered with frozen mist, shook icy drops from his coal-black locks, wiped the frost from his fiery red beard and lifted me high in his arms, all cheer and laughter. Then he began to prod the soft bundle with his own shaggy boot, rolling it about gently, and I saw that it was something alive, like^a big fluffy snowball. But as he tumbled it about, suddenly the bundle fell apart; it was two baby polar bears, and then and there they began to play. Rolling over and under each other like kittens, they finally staggered up together and stood unsteadily in a locked embrace, swaying violently from side to side, until losing their grip and

stumbled
 their balance they ~~staggered~~ helplessly, finally falling backward with all eight paws in the air. At such a charming exhibition everyone was fascinated! Then father carried them into a snug snow hut, until some sort of shelter could be fashioned for them near the gate.

"At meat before the fire father told me how he came to bring them home. Returning from the great assembly, he and his comrades were obliged to cross an ice floe that had opened during their absence. They made a raft of their leathern shields that would bear the weight of two, and so, by one and one they were all safely over, when they saw something strangely lifelike ~~within~~^{on} a tumbling cake of ice. With no great effort they were able to catch and coax the floating trap with staves and spears and guide it to their landing place. Great was the commotion when the ~~two lively play-fellows~~ two lively play-fellows ~~appeared,~~^{appeared,} eager for food and fun.

"From the first they behaved to my father as beloved pets, as though privileged before all the world, but soon they grew so huge and clumsy that they were housed in a spacious cave, with a deep spring at the far end, just outside the wall, and were thenceforth given into the care of the guards at the gate. This proved to be a delightful arrangement, for often the great fellows relieved their keepers, and gladly submitted to having the chains, which hung from the high gateposts at the entrance, clamped to the iron collars they proudly wore. When first these collars were forged they fitted so loosely that the bears could easily have slipped out of them, but such was not their desire, and soon they were tight, and fitted as closely as though they had grown there. They adored their post, stood patient and erect as sentries, and the guards were free to play truant without fear of consequences. Nor did any harm ever come of this fantastic custom. The guardian beasts were trusty souls and grew strong and mighty. The bears of Erne-Aery were famed afar.

"When they had grown to be great ponderous fellows, like massive snowdrifts beside the gate that refused to melt, my father set out with an escort of his sturdiest hunters, old trappers and young spearmen. He was displeased with a persistent rumor that necessitated a special session of the Thing, and had little enthusiasm for the journey. Departure dragged by reason of one delay after another, most formidable of which was the insistent intention of the giant bear to accompany the cavalcade. They were not to be dissuaded until my father himself barred the door to their cave and bade them sternly to wait there quietly for his return. Thereafter he set forth in peace, for an absence, as we supposed, of some three days. What was our surprise, therefore, in the dark of the dawn just following, to hear the lurs blown in wild alarm, and sudden sound of running feet and sight of leaping torches. Down the twisting stairs I felt my way out into the turmoil and suspense of those that waited within the wall.

"Slowly the agitation quieted, and a hush settled over the courtyard, and through the wide-open gateway I could see the close formed double column moving slowly and cautiously toward our waiting lights. They gave no greeting, made no sign, but marched steadily nearer and nearer, then straight through the gate, over the courtyard into the fortress. Between them at shoulder height, on a pallet of their shields, they bore with even strides the prostrate form of my father. Then the doors were closed, and I might not follow, but soon I was told they had carried him skyward to his high watch in the tower, where alone rest and healing might find him.

"Time was long and waiting mute and helpless, and no one would gather up the reins of authority, from within the frame of this bleak interval one precious scene remains ever fresh in my memory.

"When the moving line of the returning travelers was first dis-

cerned, so eager and impatient were the young human sentinels that, heedless of their master's will, they unbarred the cage and led out the bears, chaining them to their abandoned posts, and pressed forward with those that ran out to meet the band. Changelings all! No one noticed except myself that as my father passed between them through the lighted gateway, each giant guardian, by a means unprecedented in their experience, retreated with such abysmal brute strength and feline suppleness, that with a clang both iron collars rang upon the stone threshold, and with one accord the two liberated ones arose and walked with the others into the courtyard. In the days that followed they took up their watch at the foot of the tower where the wounded one lay, their great cream-colored mass flattened against the curved bulk of stone like drying pelts, their ponderous paws extended to their full reach as though to embrace the tower, the black tips of their noses straining upward, as though to sniff the news for which all waited, mute monument to brute fidelity. Nor did the outlines blur or their pose relax until that glad moment when my father, pale and wan, but with a kindling gleam in his deep blue eyes and a hearty encouragement in his deep rich voice, came out upon the parapet and thanked them roundly for their faithful watch, whereupon they wheeled, staggered about a bit, then trotted off back to the gate, where they took up their post with solemn majesty, and were never chained again.

"The snowdrifts piled up, widened and deepened until, looking at the iron rings still hanging from the chains beside the gates, it was impossible to believe that they could ever have encircled those spreading throats. Strangest of all, shortly after taking up their voluntary vigil, there approached a visitor entirely unacceptable to them. In consternation at the absence of their human allies, each guardian beast reached for the serpent-like lur that hung above him, slipped its sup-

porting thongs over his head as had the sentinels before them, and blew thereon the wheeziest blast. Of all the rasping, quavering sounds that cannot be described, these remain supreme in my mind, and brought forth merriment from all who heard. Even my father laughed outright, and for the first time since his grievous disaster.

"For dire was the import of that fateful journey, and it was many weeks before he left the protection of his lofty retreat. Men came and went by twos and threes, and finally a great gathering of all who shared the knowledge of his peril. And after that, no one might mention the matter, for they had vowed a vow of forgetfulness. Not one wanted to remember the violent strifes and ignoble family feuds that had rocked the island until the enlightenment of the present dispensation."

The youth of her listeners, recalling Svanhild's childhood in Iceland, greatly enriched her days of waiting.

V

For Anatole the theme of Svanhild's tales never seemed to end. As a dream that persists after waking, they held his brooding fantasy. Their lingering undertones struck untried resonance within him. The very evanescence of their mood and tense was restful after the fierce realism of the skald's declaiming. Most comforting of all, her chronicles were altogether credible. Their fragile, fictional relation to her own earlier youth subdued his too responsive mind. Instinctively on guard against the unforeseen, defended from the universe at large, the forced rigidity of his morale was greatly eased by Svanild's facile turn of thought and phrase and supple flowing adaptability. He found repose in the deep resonance of her being, in her softly modulated utterance, and drew a potent sustenance from the variety of her moods. For had not Krystjan counseled him that he accept her as the one in all the world to be believed? Indeed, the king's allegiance had to some degree prepared the lad for Svanhild's mobile mind and gift of charm, but more and more he was aware of realms that even Krystjan might not share, wherein she reigned supreme. Then here beside, so heroic were the measures of everyday existence that more of the same in eloquent recital the lad could not abide. It was hard enough to believe what one saw with one's eyes, without giving ear to further mystification.

With the spreading of the sails that swept him from the Faeroe Isles the charted world that he had known was utterly withdrawn. Those very mariners who manned the royal vessel through the Northern Sea were native to the ageless elements, and ruled the waves with weird and wild persuasions of their own. Their flying course, so swift and true, magically drew for Anatole the shortest possible distance between two worlds. Yet, for the brief duration of the journey's unreality, to his

unfettered fantasy the helmsman and the oarsmen, from strapping youths of untried brawn to seasoned old seaworthy salts, were borrowed from Norse antiquity, from chapters of mythology. The landsmen too were nonetheless spectacular to view. Possessed of a prodigious thirst for the volatile essence of living, they drank deep and long of labor and of rest, of sadness and of drollery, of music, laughter and revelry. They gave themselves without restraint to alternate waves of purposeful, fruitful planning or fanciful, tribal dreaming, singing in unison unrehearsed their ringing, rousing all-night songs.

Male beauty was, of course, extolled in song and story, and no wonder either, for with what glory did its virtue shine in action!

Such a knight had once been Richard Coeur de Lion when forth he fared to Palestine, according to the eulogies of errant legionnaires. But everything they told of him, the gallant troubadour had sounded frankly mythical to Anatole. Belief came hard, yet he at heart conformed and prayed the common prayer of war-torn christendom, that soon from coffered gold and spice his loyal subjects match the ever mounting price upon his royal head, with ransom requisite to bring in triumph to his rightful throne their hale and hearty hero-king. Amen. He hummed the coda at the end:

Far safer had poor Richard been
Close guarded by Sala'adin,
Nor could the mighty sultan find
A son more near his heart and mind.

Without doubt, in his early days of grandeur the young colossus had towered unique among his retinue, while here throughout the knightly train was slight if any variation! For splendor of vigor and stature there was little to choose here between the king and his men. In the eyes of the child there was more than a touch of grandeur about them all, from first to last, - bishop, king, knights, and pawns. Moreover,

a subtle family resemblance ran through the mighty race, as though derived direct from tribal deities.

Yet as of old, the lad was told, the prowess of the men themselves was still their boast, a dread phenomenon of lightning speed and skill, when legions trained, inured to cold, intrepid troops on skis, who in their race with time swooped suddenly like flocks of giant snowbirds.

On first arrival he had watched at dizzy height the solo flight in air of some young lad, half-grown and slight, following with stunned amazement the swift and birdlike dart from off the overhanging crag above his head to the graceful certain landing, subtly swerving far below. The very skis were possessed of a magical parallel skill, striking the snow with a glancing blow, that to the skier was all the difference between survival and oblivion. And when he learned that with the coming of the winter's snow he should see whole hillsides alive with men on skis, in massed maneuvers, he knew that there were giants in the land, who strode the earth and rode the wind. Sea-faring, sky-faring, storm-daring folk, and the age of gods and heroes had not passed forever. The visible aspect of life was incredible enough, without the taut enhancement of intensified description. The native, skaldic, histrionic style had tried his spirit woefully.

The actual spectacle at large was far beyond his range. The program was too harrowing, its tension too prolonged for his unseasoned temper. There were times when his childhood's untried ardor flagged under the crucial sense of suspense without climax. He longed to rest his mind in simple credence, and lose himself in narrations of the youthful queen's contrivance, nor was the lad alone in thirst for surcease from reality. Among the deft apprentices were damsels yet unused to daily tasks, whose wandering gaze and recreant ways confessed the fond allure their own belated childhood held.

The older members of the court agreed among themselves upon the queen's felicity. Some hidden talisman of potency benign preserved unchanged the paragon of her existence. Persistence of the bridal mood obtained, unfeigned acceptance of the old and new, with no reluctance in her face, for to the known and the unknown she did surrender with the selfsame grace. To men, the rare refreshment of her mind appeared to be the afterglow of early clarity; to womenfolk her fond effulgence merely seemed the brightening dawn of her maternity, but to the children it was clear that she had always been as now.

No one ever interrupted the tales Svanhild told, no child or grownup not even Ragna, who on the pretext of waiting out the narrative in court-
esy, yet without listening, overheard much that should have given her clues to the girl's mind. When she gave her account of the great game of the four suitors, long promised to the children, the spinster put aside all pretense of necessity, and with hands in a posture of innocent surprise at being empty and idle so long, listened to the end, and never missed a single pass of that inordinate ordeal.

But what an enigma was the queen! She seemed to give her confidences only to children, and had no sense of discipline or control regarding them. Unaware of her own rank, she did not recognize distinctions among her attendants, or gradations within the official worthies of the court. In Ragna's estimation, Svanhild did not even seem to know that the king was the king. Authority did not seem to impress her, but then, she was accustomed to chieftains, to conquerors and kings, and took them for granted, one and all. She could remember great nights in her father's halls, when bards and skalds would bind their spells with never to be forgotten staves, reliving the heroism of the mythological past.

Here as well, the tenor and the timbre of the men singing out the night recalled the valor of their mighty deeds, and sometimes fell into

the selfsame tunes that echoed in her childhood home. Only once had
 x Svanhild heard a woman's voice raised in solo flight. After the winter
 feast, so late at night the torches were burned out, the rousing volume
 of male voices dwindled down, the rising column of the fire wavered
 lower on the hearth, when lo, as risen from the stones, tall and shadowy
 maidens formed a ring around the falling fountain of flames, and circling
 slowly hand in hand passed into a sad and stately dance. Now bowed and
 drooping almost to the ground, then lifted high in fervent aspiration,
 silent as the rise and fall of waves unbroken in mid-ocean. As the quiet
 deepened, from their number one of slighter stature than the rest with-
 drew and mounted to the gallery above the undulating spectral ring,
 whence her pure soprano fell upon the weaving dancers as silver light
 from some far distant star on heaving waters.

Prayer of the Maidens.

Regarder of valor,
 Rewarder of pain,
 Recorder of honor
 Reserved for the slain:
 From the choice of my lover
 Refrain - refrain.

Restorer of grandeur,
 Conserver of gain,
 Dispenser of splendor
 To silence the slain:
 May the voice of my lover
 Remain - remain.

Explorer in armor
 On mountain or plain,
 Expurger of terror
 From horror's last reign:
 For our prayers have you naught but
 Disdain-disdain?

We mourners of clamor
 And warners of bane,
 Whose proffers of succor
 You scorn in your train:
 Are the tears of the lovelorn
 In vain - in vain?

Abjurers of furor,
 Come thrall or come thane,
 With ardors and tremor
 No heart can contain:
 That our lovers return, we
 Would fain - would fain.

Ah, ye warriors and sailors
 Afar on the main,
 Adorers of danger,
 Of perils and strain:
 From the lures of Valhalla
 Abstain - abstain.

Gradually, with the passing measures of the prayerful song, the sinking fire sent shadows up the dim dissolving walls. Black horses of the valkyries did ride the sky, dread cavalcades of lethal shade, until the shapes of shadows and of substance too were canceled in the feral gloom of winter's darkest hour.

When the tale of the four suitors was done, which Ragna knew was never meant for her to hear, her conscience smote her that the august fate of royal suitors should appear in such a light of slight and flimsy whimsy as the children's version. None might ever know aright the real duel, or natural ritual, by which the foregone fair conclusion did perforce eventuate. Till Krystjan's choice was made, the proper bride must bide in waiting for his wooing. That any other will than his prevail was past all questioning. Had not she herself so nursed his eager nature that nothing could withstand his life's imperative? Long before he did embark upon his quest his own propitious course was set and clear to all. In his heart of hearts his fate was sealed. She turned the phrase upon her tongue repeatedly, not questioning, but as though she could not get enough of it. "In his heart of hearts his fate was sealed.

Beyond all question, Krystjan still remained a man of the heart, for all his vivid flashing thought, renowned among his peers. They said much of his piercing, keen intelligence, as of a sword unsheathed.

Let them say on, Ragna well knew the way of his will was ever through his heart. If that same way were closed by grief or ire, woe to the one and all who hung upon his prowess. The sword indeed might just as well be sheathed for all the good its strength and keenness might perform. So had he been from the beginning, was now, and ever would be. Naturligvis.

"A maid should only love when wooed, and honor for her favor sued." So sang the minstrels of the world their serenade in unison. So rang the ever youthful theme of mortal man's undying dream. Maidens could but wait until, however late, the hero passed or paused at will, then wooed and won, but as to why or wherefore, east or west, with all the women he had looked on, veiled by distance or face to face, Krystjan's heart was set on Svanhild, whom he had never seen; the canny spinster knew she held the clue and kept it warily, wherefore its mystery increased and legends grew. Suffice it that the magnet Iceland held for him he now had drawn unto himself. Svanhild's heritage of charm transported to this very court, transplanted without harm, had taken root and flowered of its own accord. Why should she mind the lyrical inventions, the graceful innovations, the modulations and nuances of a waking dream? For Svanhild's thoughts were set to music of an earlier mode, whose sure but unfamiliar melodies estranged the hearer from his natural bent, as though in some lost sequence or unmarked event life itself had taken the wrong turning. By choice predestined without will or voice she passed her days in spendthrift ways, as one who took no count of cost. Chosen from afar for love, at love's behest she breathed and talked and walked within a trance, a fond felicitous estate, committed to her fate! Had such an aura but sustained Ranghena on her earthly pilgrimage, - what then, - how now?

As for Svanhild, there was no mother to tell her of a sun-bright

visitant, a prince of grace and golden fire, who in his glowing childhood came into their midst, like Baldur's fleet impassioned page, a ministrant from Alfheim undisguised, and how he stood before her even then, holding his heart in his hands. Or rather, now that Ragna came to think of it, there was no Svanhild then, no little listening daughter to be told or shown his visage in the gazing-ball, or taught the rune he learned to live by long ago:

In the lure of your heart
Look for surcease from strife.
On the cure of your soul
Hangs the sceptre of life.

Enough for Svanhild in her charmed estate that his suit had triumphed gloriously. Naturligvis.

VI

At Ghenalt's invitation, the gode and his daughter on her barque "The Singing Swan", stored with such treasure as she deemed essential to her new estate, had arrived at the Faeroes where Krystjan awaited them. The wedding ceremony was performed in the ecclesiastical setting of the sanctuary, solemnized by the whole order and glorified by the great monastery choir.

When the wedding mass had been intoned, the vows exchanged and the union blessed and sanctified, a nuptial feast with heartfelt conviviality fulfilled the bishop's hospitality, whereupon amid lingering farewells the wedded ones took ship on their predestined argosy, an unrehearsed duet sans memory or prophecy.

Hearts had won. Sanguine and compelling with sea-blue glance so piercing bright from out the vivid, fervid face, so fair of tint and rich of mold severely framed in flaming gold, and head so high that none could ever have said no to him, himself had been her girlish choice at sight. A choice, at first but reticent, reluctant, then eager and exultant, had straightway spread great wings and carried her beyond the known, farther and farther and farther from home.

A visionary voyage theirs, an apparition motionless in shadowless infinity. Their dragon ship, balanced by its own unwavering reflection, hung poised in perfect symmetry. A celestial universe, the heavens above, the heavens below, melting iridescent and translucent, buoyant in unstable equilibrium.

They sailed a halcyon sea until in sight of land, when suddenly a storm arose with mounting waves. At first, with unspent strength and skill the laboring vessel held its course, sinking with the yawning

trough or riding high against the sky upon the lifting horizon, until at last the ^{plunging} prow crashed upon a hidden rock, and all the living had been lost but for the fearless rescue from the shore.

But now at last, these perils past, safeguarded from inclemency, Svanhild found herself in a lotus-eating land, where the days were as a dream-procession passing her by in essence ever more unreal, while Krystjan was a man of affairs, with a lively interest in every moment of every hour. Constantly committed to some demand upon his time, sympathy or wit he was wary and alert, as though he held in leash many insurgent forces, dangerous if released.

Soon one year of their conjoined existence must be subtracted from the unspent future, and added to the lengthening ledger of the past. A year of fateful peril and escape, disquietude had passed, and faith at first reluctant, but unfurled at last in full felicity, and now the final mooring in tranquility. She knew again, as when a child in Iceland on the drifting snow of her living barque, that she lived a charmed life, moved in the majestic measures of a world-old idyll, and had her being in the conditions of its inexorable and unhurried theme.

Summer held high festival. Upon the placid surface of the shadowless sea of life the season floated gently, becalmed in changeless light. Form and substances were ethereal, outlines but frail frontiers between fields of color. No hint of gloom or hungry hidden peril nibbled at the edges of this fair and seamless garment of security. A deep, elemental languor set its stamp alike on motion and emotion, tempering both thought and inclination to its own leisurely pace, harmonizing the pitch and tempo of all breath in a paean of peace.

VII

Ragna had a rendezvous on the airy upland, where the gaze reached farthest, the sun held steadiest and the world looked widest. With perennial hardihood she found her way along the winding shore. The sequence of events would soon unfold, naught could change the order of the day. Its intervals would follow and its accents fall as the phrases of a folk song, set long since and always sung the same. Hers but to hear it through attentively.

Slower grew her sauntering steps and sometimes ceased reluctantly. Well before she glimpsed the ghostly bridal veil beyond the curving pathway, now from the left, now from the right she heard the shivering rush of sister streamlets preening their lesser veils as modest maids-in-waiting, and underneath the shelving shore the running speech of waves recalling the very selfsame scene from the early days of her own far-distant youth. Behind the curtain of the stately stream a memory awaited her each year to wound her with its poignance. There beneath the mist-hung height of the great tor, watching the icy torrent pour and shatter on the rock-strewn floor, had she not waited long ago - waited in a fated trance, for one who never came? A maiden decked in hope forlorn, whose marriage lines were writ in water! Here she paused a breathless interval for the never failing stroke of pain to prove again one last frail link with vulnerable youth unbroken did remain. Once more the sinking heart and waning senses, as though her very substance turned to tears to join the downward column of the cataract, and then for one fell crash, as in the poignance of a dream, falling, falling, falling headlong in a voiceless scream!

When the cataclysm passed, she lingered still within the luminous

gloom, lost in her own consoling element, to let the old dream die once more. So the heart does not decline, for all its hope deferred, nor the sharpness of its pangs abate with years of toil. Time passed, but not associations. They were still there, where they had always been, behind the shrouding veil, despite her year-long absences. So ran the sequence of her reverie, each phrase a phrase precisely linked, as were the summers intervening since first the lonely tryst began.

And what of him who never came, who never kept nor missed the tryst? Exempt from every tribal claim, from tender hopes of womankind to living share of later honor, with none to carry on his name, the all-providing order of his calling ruled his heart and mind. Computing not the fatal cost, the mortal shame of lineage lost, inheritance forsworn, the life-line of succession cleft, what greater human sacrifice could any creed enforce? And to what end withal? To what avail the baleful price, the monstrous heartless reckoning, for him who paid sans questioning? Incapable of laying siege to what, forsooth, was rightly his, unable to possess himself thereof, unfit to have and hold his own or even to seek out and find the faithful, willing, waiting one, from first to last unknown and unconfessed, forever bound to him alone, forever unpossessed.

Here, as oft before, her thoughts gave way, but with sudden upward swerve resumed their wonted sway. What unrequiting quest was this! What headlong plunge into what answerless abyss! What carping echo of forgotten grief, inveighed against the cordon of her years, blasphemed the sum and substance of her faith? Some fierce persistence of puerility, now meaningless, inane, and false the shrill denial of living gain, but treas to the reason! Was she herself unrecompensed, bereft of life's fruititio Her hands were full, her hours and days and ways were swollen wide with prideful toil - and yet, unto what final goal withal? To what avail the long travail? With labor done, with honor gone, would hope decline and ccourage fail?

To Ragnà, judging by the measure of her years, stirring freshness of oncoming life in still another generation should offer no surprise - battallions of youths and damsels, new to the tests each summer, younger than ever. To be sure, these latter day lads seemed slow of growth. They did not handsome up so soon, nor could they sing as once they sang, though lustily enough their voices rang in jeer or jest, but hourly and daily, steadily, readily, weathering the changeful elements, contending with nature, themselves and each other, they would grow in mind and stature into mighty manhood, without once ceasing to be boys. She knew them one and all, just lads forever, unless by some ill chance the norms decreed that woman's toil fall to their lot, in which sad case they early wore the look of it that all might read their fate aright, with manly pride in conquest, first postponed and then renounced forever, and will to power in prowess annulled by tender patience.

But with girls you never could foretell. All was unforeseen. Nature was furtive and clandestine; watching was of no avail and warnings always came too late. More and more she marveled now how prodigal was youth! What boundless storehouse could support such riotous largesse? Their substance spent in heedless fun or headless fury, in reckless banter or in feckless torment, forever feeding raucous lovers' quarrels, where mending proved more costly than the rending, luxuries that Ragna in her long abstemious life had never tasted. Indulgences were foreign to her nature, and penance unnatural to her thrift. But what of those incautious ones, uncurbed, unwarned, who taste the broth before the feast and burn their tongues full sore, and therefore lose their pleasure in viands yet to come? What guardian influence could prevent the cruel smart, the dual waste of goodly foods and natural taste? Still, lasses in their early bloom were fair. However swift and unaccountable the rift between the uninvaded tenor of childhood and the reinstated

honor of maturity, the lapse was brief and their delinquency displaced by a dignity of posture that came all too soon.

Her thoughts were slow, wherefore she leaned upon her staff to hear them through. No haste nor interruption cut their lengthening thread. Quite as though they stepped from out her reverie into the open any eyes might see, little sisters, passing hand in hand, wandered toward the upper pasture lands, where solitary maidens but slightly older than themselves did watch the grazing herds. Chimes of their laughter came floating long after their childish forms had passed from view. From somewhere rang the natural echoes of a song - or were those phantom intervals, the practised prowess of antiphonal voices, valleys and valleys apart? From somewhere else, perhaps, the eerie imitation was but that of one lone phenomenal singer. Ragna could not detect the subterfuge precisely, nor gauge the distance of the far carrying repetitions. Each year a voice of some such purity and range had struck upon her ear, and with the ebb of summer's tide was its possessor chosen among the many that were called for service in the fortress labyrinth, to sing above the humming wheel and the droning loom the winter through, to lessen the talk and lighten the toil. She listened now for some such distant voice, whose unknown tone might prove this season's choice.

Life's Last Garment.

She holds her lover longest
Who would scorn to try.
Full sure her heart of hope
Was never born to die.
Born to die.

She folds her faith around her form
With peerless grace,
And holds within its vesture warm
Her fearless pace.
Fearless pace.

Until at dusk she drops the veil
Beyond the height,
To stand alone at last where faith
Is lost in sight.
Lost in sight.

Yet what a boon was toil! How benign a magnet for heart and mind and hand through drear, dread months of dark and cold! How sustaining to such as were sheltered, landlocked and icebound with raging fears that prayers could not tame, for such as were shelterless, helpless and comfortless upon the open main! A boon indeed, while bitter winter winds did smite the tender hopes of life!

Then there was need, the never ending need for provender and strengthening mead and milk of human kindness, the ceaseless advent of the newly born, requiring fresh accoutrement and nutriment, objects of concern for cherishing and nourishing. For, ever from the postern gate the winter through, a breadline wound away in lengthening queue. Hers it was to dole out shares of wares. Hers a privilege of sorts to dispense the indispensable and thus preserve the balance betwixt need and surplus, surplus and need!

But, thought Ragna, with the good life in this good land, it was a boon to all good hearts and minds that the words for God and good were the same, the terms were interchangeable, the almighty Creator and the ever present quality were one and the same syllable, so that you knew what you were saying when you repeated the text, "All things work together for good for them that love God." But Ragna did not need to proceed beyond the first phrase of the precept, for she loved work, and all things worked together to exalt and augment this love of her life.

Yet even here this previous year, how changeable were the symptoms of the body politic! No diagnosis held. The mirror of the world was hung askew, its surface clouded, shrouded over. Reflections, once therein so sharp and clear and whole, were shattered and scattered without rhyme or reason. On every hand was unforeseen effect and unfamiliar evidence of causes quite unknown, the passing scene transformed by every passer-by, and persons in the aggregate, estranged by customs, costumes, gestures, names and intonations. The even beat of life was changed

disturbingly. This twelve-month past, replete with seeming new, yet oddly teeming with the old; now filtering through from far more ancient, more exotic lands! Intimations everywhere, but emanations from earlier altar fires, whose potential atmosphere, like heavy pungent incense from the temples there, clung to the grand recessional of errant hosts returning. Then there were aliens in the land that came and went unceasingly, strangers now within the gates, and of their number two were fixtures here, and not to be ignored.

First, of course, came Svanhild, a world in herself, ever the same, content with changelessness. Then came Anatole, unique and never the same, content alone with change, his frame consumed with restlessness. Yet in himself the child merely seemed the speaking likeness caught in miniature of a vast challenge following Christian knights returning from their eastern pilgrimage. The western world was now in transition. A foreign emphasis ran through the conversation of the time, disturbing both the rhythm and the rhyme.

But Krystjan was now immersed in legends drawn from Svanhild's heritage, and their translation was his major diversion. Intrinsic wealth did there abound. The early Runic had a cryptic sound, the later Latin was no less profound in character. And yet, the grueling undertaking was surely none of Svanhild's making. Not only was transcription all the fashion, but passion for translation had pursued him ever since his first propitious northern expedition. Furthermore, it pleased the king to think the labored lines, compact and set, must long outlast the patient enterprise and still be read when all that breathed on earth today had fled, its zestful timbre sounding and resounding like the ring of ancient coins on modern paving stones.

One song there was the king had never heard, for Svanhild sang it after his departure, in the quiet hall where once the pride and press

of industry held sway. None but Ragna heard the sudden, soaring rush of words in tones beyond and most unlike her low accustomed range. Some startling change here marked her mood! Relieved of all intrusion, disquiet or interruption, free to pursue devotional endeavor, she worked no more, nor even scrutinized the color skeins so smoothly wound and laid away in final, formal, deft array. No threads left dangling, no loose ends, as unaware of observation she set all straight, and in a voice uncurbed of caution poured out in accents wild such clarion, pagan passion as Ragna could recall in secret, surreptitious^{services}/attended when she was a frightened child.

Freya's Wail of Travail

With four harts running wild and free
 Over the branches of Ygdrasil tree,
 Biting the tender buds of life,
 Smiting the slender hopes, now rife.
 Where shall my safety be?
 There will none shelter me,
 Caught in the toils of the tortuous tree;
 Born out of ailing,
 Torn with travailing,
 Wrought by the pitiless Three!
 Ah, when will the mournful Norns agree,
 Winding their wool under Ygdrasil tree?

Ragna's stride was stayed for long deliberation.

Nor wife nor midwife she, but many were called to serve this constant, crucial recurrence in the thriving realm, and of the number to keep watch over Svanhild night and day. the best must now be chosen and closeted in the castle. The girl must not lack care, however dauntless and aloof. Queens had ever given cause for grave concern in the perilous hour of parturition. Concern indeed,

may wild alarm, lest harm ensue and they themselves, without a word or look or gesture or farewell, expire for aught that anyone could say or do! She knew, alas, how well she knew! Where was now, in all the smiling scene, the kindliness and stately grace that marked Ranghena's reign, although she ne'er was crowned as queen. Her comely image, once so clear and strong, all but unknown, even to her son!

In Ragna's memory alone her image shone, while now in the king as once in the bishop, all unconsciously, some glance or pose or gesture, reminders of her vanished flame, would flash as tapers lit within a wayside shrine for lonely pilgrims passing, and echoes of her cherished name revive the will that did instill her own facility and skill. And where in the land of the living now was the beauty, once far-famed, of Iceland's Evelaine? None here save Krystjan could recall the likeness clear above the transient crowds that thronged the present scene. Two glowing apparitions, invisible but ever present as twin opposites of light and shade, eclipsing often ^{their} in/bright intensity, both for Krystjan and for Ragna, impressions of their later lives. Two mothers of exalted rank, who in the hey-day of the heart and mind passed so swiftly out of sight or touch, beyond the reach of voice or speech, one after the other, their fondest hopes forever left behind! And still no answer to the carping, "Wherefore of it all," in after-years of useless, garrulous questioning!

Throughout Ranghena's early day disquiet reigned, the whole realm torn with civil strife. Terror stalked the stoutest hearts, hunger dogged the steps of life. While fear, forsooth, had smote her heart and brought her to the drawbridge of her life with mortal wound, yet in the end her thoughts were merciful, and stealthily did each and all make way before the vision splendid, by which those dying young are gloriously attended. At death-time and at birth-time, Ragna knew, the temporal